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An Outline For An Essay On Canadian Foreign Policy: East Timor and Indonesia and The Discourse of Development

by

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On March 11 of this year Canada for the first time ever voted in support of a strong resolution criticizing Indonesia over its human rights record in East Timor in the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). The year before, following the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili, External Affairs officials made strong statements of concern and imposed sanctions through the freezing of $30 million dollars in bilateral aid. From such actions it might be concluded that Canada is taking a progressive stance towards the situation in East Timor and is providing the kind of leadership expected of a country seen worldwide as champion of human rights and self-determination. This would be a false conclusion. A more careful consideration of these actions reveals quite a different story, particularly when put into the context of Canada's domestic and foreign policies over the last 28 years.

Although the Canadian delegation to the UNHRC had been briefed by the East Timor Alert Network, Amnesty International, and the Canada-Asia Working Group, the delegation was seen by observers as actually seeking a watered down resolution. Canada had only changed its position to vote in favour of the strong resolution after the US delegation received new orders from Washington to co-sponsor a strong resolution. Looking at the apparently strong position taken after the Santa Cruz massacre there are two significant points to be noted. Firstly, the suspension of aid affected only about $150,000 in actual disbersements, as the rest were new projects still to be funded. Secondly, at the UNHRC in 1992, Canada, along with the US, Australia, and Japan, had blocked any meaningful action and successfully lobbied for a weak resolution concerning the massacre.

The real story of Canadian foreign policy towards Indonesia and East Timor follows a similar pattern. Despite Canada's carefully cultivated image as everyone's favourite peacekeeper and international do-gooder, the Candian government has since 1965 turned a blind eye to the gross human rights violations and atrocities against humanity committed by the Indonesian military regime. But the nature of this blindness goes beyond mere apathy or complacency, and instead reflects a consistent complicity in the crimes committed by the Indonesian government.

This charge of complicity is indeed a strong charge, a charge that would deeply offend those officials in government who often believe they are somehow working on the side of goodness. But it is a charge that is overwhlemingly justified by the facts, by the deeds, if not always unambiguously evil intentions. What I will present here is a brief overview of the case against the Canadian government and its co-conspirators. There are three lines of inquiry to be pursued here in making my case. The first is a simple chronology of some the actions and reactions taken by the government with respect to Indonesia and East Timor. The second line of inquiry is the political discourse created by the government to justify its actions, that is to say, the rationalizations and propaganda used to prop up its policy. The third line of inquiry is closely related to the second line. This inquiry is aimed at deconstructing the political economic discourse to reveal the true motivations and intentions as well the the belief and value systems that allow these officials to sleep at night when the reality of their actions indicates collusion in the worst crimes against humanity. I will only provide a brief outline of these three lines of inquiry.

1: **A Chronology of Canada's Complicty**

We can take as our starting point the 1965 coup d'tat which brought Suharto's military regime to power. This coup was received very well in the west and was described in *TIME* magazine as the "West's best news in Asia in years" and in Toronto's *Globe and Mail*, Canada's only national newspaper, despite full knowledge of widespread massacres, commended the ascendance of Suharto by stating: "it is both encouraging and remarkable that responsible leaders have emerged in Indonesia." This statement echoed the official position of the government as Canada has operated as a junior partner in many of the US's imperialist and so-called anti-communist escapades, toeing the line of its larger, overtly aggressive and intimidating neighbour. This is a position that has remained constant to this very day.

Canda's sympathic acceptance of the increasingly militarized regime of Suharto is easily understood given its identification of Indonesia with its long-term national economic strategy in the Pacific Rim. The opening up of Indonesia to extensive foreign investment and the creation of a very favourable investment climate under the Suharto's "New Order" regime was warmly welcomed welcomed in Canada despite full awareness of the role of increasing militarization of Indonesian

society. Putting pragmatic economic interest before the principles of social justice, the Canadian government has worked with Canadian business elites and Indonesia's military rulers to turn Indonesia into an "investors paradise". After the coup Canada business was quick to capitalize on the new opportunities for business investment. By the time of the invasion of East Timor Canada was the second largest investor in Indonesia, second only to Japan, and foreign economic aid was extensive, being provided to assist businesses to establish themselves.

After The Invasion of East Timor

Follwing the invasion of East Timor, Canada was guiltly not only of being complacent in providing support for East Timor, but was instead actively complicit in helping Indonesia. Canada has provided military, economic, and diplomatic support to Indonesia, while being derelict in its duties to uphold its obligations as a signatory to the UN Charter in its failure to support the independence of East Timor. Two days after the invasion, when the Prime Minister was questioned as to why the Canadian government was going to invest in a pulp and paper plant in Indonesia:

> "in view of the recent invasion by Indonesia of Portugese Timor and of the apparent corrupt and barbaric regime of President Suharto?"

PM Trudeau brushed off the issue of East Timorese, stating " I do not share the honourable member's premise." The greatest expression of concern ever mustered by Canadian officials to date has been a feigned "regret" over the "method of incorporation", but never has the "incorporation been substantially objected to.

Canada has been a consistent and growing investor in Indonesia. As well Canada has been generous in providing economic aid through its Official Development Assistance programs. Only two months after the invasion, General Suharto visited Canada and recieved a $200 million mixed aid package from the Trudeau's Liberal government. (The External Affairs Minister at that time was Jean Chretian, who will in all likelihood be the next Prime Minister latter this year.)

Some examples of Canada's support for Indonesia:

- In 1984 Canada hosted an arms bazaar in Jakarta for Canadian arms manufacturers. Canada has found it quite profitable to supply arms to military regimes throughout the world - (even during the Vietnam war Canada provided over $100 million in arms in direct violation of our official position on the International Control Commission in the UN).

- Despite denials by the the Minister of External Affairs, Canada continues to sell Indonesia military equipment, much of it to be used for counter-insurgency in East Timor, West Papua and Aceh. This year alone there are 10 contracts for military equipment but the details are kept secret by External Affairs, the official excuse being that release of the information would threaten national security.

- Canada has over 300 companies doing business in Indonesia with investsments of over $2 billion. Companies include the huge resource extraction companies like ALCAN, INCO, Noranda, and MacMillan Bloedel. Manufacturers include the notorious BATA Shoes. Several Canadian Oil companies, banks, and consulting firms are also present.

- Between 1987 and 1991 bilateral aid was approximately $450 million. Most of Canada's development aid is merely circulated through the Indonesian economy, returning to subsidized Canadian multinational corporations, engineering and consulting firms (especially the infamous Lavalin). All this is to help maintain domestic control in Indonesia while developing the infrastructure necessary to maintaining Canadian businesses and their access to the markets.

- Canada has been a continuous contributor to the international consortiums associated with the UN's neo-colonialist institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which

"develop" economies through projects that create dependence through debt, debt crisis, and Structural Adjustment Programs... to ensure the massive wealth of natural resources and labour through their systematic undervaluation (and thus maintaing export surpluses for rich Western countries.)

- Canada provided dimplomatic support for Indonesia in the UN by either abstaining or voting against all 10 resolutions condemning Indonesia. Beginning in 1980, following the visit of Ambassador Shortliffe to East Timor, Canada changed its pattern of voting in the UN from abstentions to active opposition to the UN resolutions. Additionally Canada actively took up the cause of Indonesia, seeking to have the issue of East Timor removed from UN agendas, or when failing to do this, has sought to weaken resolutions and block meaningful actions.

- Following the Santa Cruz massacre External Affairs Minister praises "the commitment of the Indonesian government to ensure the perpetrators among the military and civilians will be brought to justice."

- There are 26 Development projects being funded by Canada in East Timor itself.

- There are over $100 million in development projects in Indonesia being operated by Canadian Universities. The underfunding of Canadian Universities has made them vulnerable to the funds available through so-called "internation cooperation" partnerships. It is notable that many of these proponents and directors of these projects are not academics but rather are former government and corporate consultants and apologists.

Development Discourse and Official Apologies.

The driving force behind Canadian ODA is a vision of "Enlightened self-interest". That is to say, aid which will boast Canada's own strength as a nation and keep the receiving country dependent. The pramatism of Canadian policy is summed up nicely in this statement by a prominent former Canadian diplomatic:

"By all means hang on to your principles, and then find a way to get around them."

But the blatant cynicism of the Realpolitik would not hold well in the public mind, thus we find a discourse of social and economic development loosely associated with the progressive principles of social justice and the mission of civilization. A central tenet of Canadian foreign aid is the notion of altruism and humanitarianism. It is upon this basis that the official apologies and rationalizations provided by External Affairs officials are constructed. This has enable the Canadian government to channel 75% of all aid to military regimes like Indonesia's.

Fictions about East Timor in Candian Foreign Policy and the Media.

It was only three years after the invasion that Canada gave defacto recognition to Indonesia's annexation of East Timor as its 27th province. This is quite unlike Canada's positions regarding many other occupations around the world in which it has taken strong stands despite the passage of decades. The basis of this defacto recognition was the fiction that Indonesia's annexation was a *fait accompli.* The fait accompli fiction was the most important outcome of Ambassador Shortliffe's 1979 visit to East Timor and was the basis of the change of Canada's position on UN resolutions condemning Indonesia. Canada no longer abstained from voting but actively voted against the resolutions all the while actively lobbying to have the issue of East Timor removed from all UN agendas.

The apparent change in Canada's position came the Ambassodor was taken on one of guided tours by the military. Basing his "realistic assesment" upon observations made from helicopter flyovers and information provided by Indonesian military advisors, and without ever making contact with any East Timorese, he came to the staggering conclusion that the Fretilin resistance was finished and thus no longer posed a threat to the security of the area. He also came to the patently absurd conclusion that:

> East Timor is not a viable economic entity and had it become an independent country, both politically and economically it would have had to been sustained by some outside power... The economic and social development of East Timor at the time of the Portuguese withdrawal was rock-bottom. A primitive, ignored population existed in what I can only describe as stark poverty.

Thus a year after his visit, in 1980, Canada voted against a UN resolution on self-determination and humanitarian assistance to East Timor stating that:

> The UN resolutions do not reflect present political realities or the humanitarian aid development needs of the people of East Timor.

In the minds of Canadian government apologists, the so-called poverty of the East Timorese justified accepting a political reality of mass murder or genocide as saving the East Timorese. And when the end result of all that killing could support a "realistic assessment" of the elimination of resistance, then a new fiction could be propagated through which meant civilizing and developing the East Timorese.

A key to this fait accompli fiction was the proposition that the Fretilin resistance and the people of the East Timorese were two completely separate entities. In fact it is suggested that it is the Fretilin which is responsible for the atrocities being committed against the people. The counter part of this fiction was the ignoring of the overwhelming evidence provided in reports by Amnesty International and other groups of the brutality of the invasion and occupation. Often their information was dismissed by suggesting that they were exaggerated or falacious because of the deliberate bias of overseas resistance or leftist sympathizers, or that the information was years out of date.

Evidence of the violence has been systematically ignored and dismissed to the extent that when the Santa Cruz massacre took place officials could dismiss it as a mere incident, an aberation from a norm of peace. It is readily apparent that to the government that unless massacres are widely reported to the public then they never really happen.

The rhetoric of development in the Canadian government follows a historical tradition in which the Canadian government has sought to "develop" and assimilate the indigenous peoples of Canada. The development projects funded by Canada in East Timor are remarkable similar to those carried out in Canada's past. The success of development is often measured by the number of taxis present, or the desirability to tourists, or of the success of cash crop exports - that is to say, the extent of dependency and subjugation of the local economy and the commodification of the labour of its people.

More recent development rhetoric centres upon a constellation of concepts associated with "globalism", the "management of global interdependence", "global competition", and the imperatives of technological progress and inevitability. The "Raw and the Cooked" are in modern developmental parlance the "Primitive and the Global Citizen".

Conclusion

Over the past 28 years Canada has developed deep institutional ties with Indonesia. The Canadian government welcomes visits from known Indoneisan butchers. Ties between Universities are heavily funded to promote the growth of the bureaucratic and technocratic mechanisms of control. Canadian business is deeply involved and the Canadian economy is reliant upon an institutionalized "taking" process through the exploitation of Indonesia's and East Timor's resources and labour. High value added goods are exported in exchanged for a mass of grossly undervalued wealth. Canada is able to do this by remaining silent on the behavior on Indonesia's military regime. This silence is called "Quiet Diplomacy", a type of diplomacy where, by being "friendly and conciliatory", Canada becomes complicit in the worst crimes against humanity.